

SUBJECT: NASS Recognition and Awards Program

EFFECTIVE: October 1, 2000

EXPIRES: October 1, 2005

FOR ACTION BY: State Statistical Offices and Headquarters Units

REFERENCES: Department's Guide for Employee Recognition (Blue Book)
1999 NASS Organizational Climate Survey Team Report
A-9-99 1999 Awards for Excellence Program

Approved by: _____
Associate Administrator

- I. **PURPOSE:** This PSM outlines the NASS Recognition and Awards Program, revising the program implemented in 1997. In July 1999, the Administrator formed an Organizational Climate Survey Team to analyze the results of the 1999 NASS Organizational Climate Survey and to make recommendations for change. One of the areas identified by the team as needing improvement was "Rewards, Recognition, and Feedback." The revision of this PSM is based on recommendations from that team, while continuing to follow the guidelines established in the Department's Guide for Employee Recognition published in 1994. Additionally, an effort has been made to concatenate material from several documents dealing with awards into a single, simplified PSM.
- II **AWARD POLICY AND GOALS:** The NASS Recognition and Awards Program is intended to create an environment in the NASS workplace where awards are viewed as "fair," and where excellent effort and output by employees are recognized and celebrated. The NASS awards system should be viewed as a tool for expressing appreciation for outstanding work rather than as an instrument for motivation. It is the objective of this program to distribute recognition and awards equitably, in a timely manner, and with broad input from co-workers as well as managers using a set of consistent and objectively applied standards. NASS intends to set aside one to 1-1/2 percent of salaries each year to fund the award pool. Approximately 75 percent of those monies are expected to be used throughout the year for Spot, Extra Effort, and other awards, leaving 25 percent of the award monies to fund the Awards for Excellence program. NASS managers and Award Committees are strongly encouraged to use this program to its fullest extent to recognize and reward employees that give the extra effort needed to keep NASS a top performing organization. Specific guidelines include: effectively utilize non-monetary as well as monetary awards; reward group as well as individual achievement; reward and recognize sustained excellent performance as well as work on special projects and teams; equitably reward and recognize individuals in every job series. Collectively, this document, the A-instruction on Awards, the Department's Guide for Employee Recognition, and the guidelines documents for individual award committees, constitute the only

guidelines to be used in determining how to recognize exceptional work within NASS. *There will be no unwritten guidelines imposed by managers or Award Committees.*

II. SIGNIFICANT CHANGES: The following significant changes have been made in the Recognitions and Awards Program:

- The percent of award monies allocated to the Awards for Excellence has been standardized across Divisions and FO at 25 percent. Other monies will be used for awards throughout the year.
- Bronze and Silver Awards have been eliminated. The Platinum Award has been renamed the Administrator's Award.
- The \$500 limit per award year for an individual on Spot Awards has been lifted.
- Suggestion Awards more than \$500 need committee approval.
- Individual extra effort awards and an individual's portion of a group extra effort award can not equal or exceed the amount of a Gold Award.
- Procedures for cross-organizational Extra Effort Group Awards have been clarified.
- Criteria and procedures for Circle Awards have been clarified.
- All Gold Award recipients will be nominated for the Administrator's Award.
- The Cooperator of the Year Awards will be selected by the NASS Award Committee along with the Administrator's Awards, rather than by the FO Award Committee.
- Any existing unwritten criteria or guidelines for recognition and awards have been abolished.

III. TYPES OF AWARDS AND ELIGIBILITY:

Employees with Federal appointments (except for Senior Executives and Senior Scientists) are eligible to receive any of the agency awards listed below. Individuals employed through other types of appointments (i.e., state employees) are eligible for Appreciation Awards, Time-Off Awards, Cooperator of the Year Awards, and other awards as appropriate within the regulations governing their appointments.

A. **Non-Monetary Awards:** The most prestigious award within USDA, the Secretary's Honor Award, is an example of non-monetary recognition. NASS values non-monetary awards equally with those having accompanying monetary recognition. **NASS supervisors are encouraged to make greater use of the flexibility provided by these awards.**

Appreciation Award: This type of award can take many forms, including a memento, engraved plaque, framed certificate of appreciation, or the designation of "employee of the month". Appreciation Awards can be effectively used as recognition for such things as a superior contribution on a short-term assignment or project, implementation of a new change, displaying special initiative, or saving money. They can be used effectively to recognize the accomplishments of non-Federal employees, groups and teams. There is no limit on the number of appreciation awards an employee may receive.

Appreciation Awards are approved by the State Statisticians, Branch Chiefs, and/or Division Directors, and, unless otherwise stated in this document, do not need committee approval. Check "Keepsake Award" in box 12 on the awards form.

Items for Appreciations Awards are available in the NASS Awards Catalog on the NASSNet. Alternatively, items may be purchased locally. Expenditures should be obligated in the budget under supply budget codes. **Use the following guidelines in choosing a memento to be used as an Appreciation Award.**

- ✱ The item must cost \$250 or less.
- ✱ It must have lasting trophy value, and must clearly symbolize the workplace relationship, by displaying the USDA or NASS name or logo. (This rules out items such as gift certificates, movie tickets, etc.)
- ✱ The item must be something that the recipient would reasonably be expected to value, without conveying a sense of monetary value.
- ✱ The item must be suitable for public display.

Time-Off Award: A Time-Off Award is used to grant *immediate “on-the-spot” recognition* for specific contributions to the unit’s, Agency’s or the Department’s mission or goals. It recognizes employees for a specific accomplishment, superior contribution on short-term assignments, and for efforts that achieve cost-savings. They can be used in lieu of Spot Awards for comparable achievements. Time-off Awards may also be given as a group award. Time-Off Awards are approved by the State Statisticians, Branch Chiefs, and/or Division Directors, and do not need award committee approval.

Guideline: Authorize up to 10 hours of time-off for *small to moderate contributions*, while *substantial contributions* may be granted up to a maximum of 40 hours per award. (A narrative justification must be attached to the award form for any time-off award that exceeds 10 hours.) An individual may not be granted more than 80 hours of time-off in a single leave year. Employees must use their time-off within one calendar year from the date the award was granted.

Check “Time-Off Award” in box 12 on the award form. See Attachment I for special processing instructions.

B. Monetary Awards: These awards are an important part of the NASS award program, providing additional flexibility to our award program. These awards are funded through obligations to the “awards” budget code. Unless otherwise specified, the approving official is responsible for assuring that adequate funding is available within their budget allocation.

Spot Award: A Spot Award is used to grant *immediate monetary “on-the-spot” recognition* for specific contributions to the unit’s, Agency’s or the Department’s mission or goals. This monetary award recognizes employees for a specific accomplishment, superior contribution on short-term assignments, for efforts that achieve cost-savings, etc. They can be approved by State Statisticians, Branch Chiefs, and/or Division Directors. They do not need committee approval. **Spot Awards may not be presented to groups.**

Spot Awards cannot exceed \$500 *per award* or be less than is \$50. The previous limitation of \$500 per person per year has been lifted. There are no specific limits to the number of Spot Awards an individual may receive. Check “Spot Award” in box 12 on the awards form. The dollar amount on the award form is the amount the individual will receive. The amount obligated to the budget will include an additional amount (usually 25% to 30%) to cover tax withholding. See Attachment I for special processing instructions.

Suggestion Awards: Employees who make suggestions for developing new processes (or methods) that improve the efficiency or effectiveness of the unit’s or the Agency’s operations are eligible for a Suggestion Award if the suggestion is adopted or implemented. Award amounts can range from \$50 to more than \$10,000. Also, an employee may even be given a non-monetary award for submission of a suggestion whether it is adopted or not. For Suggestion Awards \$500 or less, approvals and reviews follow the same approval process as the Spot or Time-Off Awards. If the award is between \$500 and \$2500, they must be approved by a Division/FO/DAPP/SSO Awards Committee. Suggestion awards \$2500 or more must be approved by the NASS Awards Committee and the Administrator.

Extra Effort Awards: These awards are designed to provide a vehicle for recognizing an effort or contribution that has substantial impact on the unit and/or agency. Extra effort awards may be given to individuals or to groups. An award may be given for a single, significant effort, or for superior sustained effort in performing normal day-to-day duties. Award amounts can range from \$50 to \$10,000, and must have award committee approval. An individual extra effort award must be less than the amount for a Gold Award. Likewise, any one individual’s portion of a group extra effort award is similarly limited. Check “Extra Effort Award” in box 12 on the awards form. A narrative justification is required.

An Extra Effort Award to an individual is intended to recognize significant efforts that are larger in scope than would receive a Spot Award. The award amount is generally larger, and one individual is not expected to receive an Extra Effort Award as frequently as one might receive a Spot Award.

Extra Effort Awards may be given to teams (or groups). Teams do not have to be formally chartered in order to be eligible for these awards. The overall award amount can range from \$50 to \$10,000, and the amount of money given to each group member may be different, and should reflect each individual’s contribution to the overall effort. Non-federal employees may be included in Extra Effort Group Awards, but they may only receive a non-monetary recognition as part of the award. **NASS strongly encourages the use of this type of team award.**

Extra Effort Awards, both individual and group, need award committee approval. For individual awards, and for group awards in which all members of the group are under the same award committee (i.e., within the same Division or SSO), the award must be approved by that award committee and the Division Director/State Statistician/Staff Director. The team sponsor or supervisor will generally serve as the recommending official. The chairperson of the award committee will serve as the reviewing official, and the Director/State Statistician will serve as the approving official.

For group awards that cross organizational boundaries (i.e., not serviced by the same award committee), the NASS Incentive Award Committee will review and approve the award. Divisions/SSOs/Staffs are responsible for funding the portion of the award covering employees from their organizational units. Thus, all affected divisions/FO/DAPP must concur with these group Extra Effort Awards. For these awards, the team sponsor will generally initiate the award and serve as the recommending official. The chairperson of the NASS Awards Committee will serve as the reviewing official. A separate sheet must be attached to the award form which will obtain the approving signatures of the award committee chairs from affected divisions (FO/SSO/DAPP). Finally, the approving official on the form will be either the Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (if the group consists only of FO staff), the Deputy Administrator for Program and Products (if the group consists only of HQ staff), or the Associate Administrator (if the group is mixed FO and HQ staff). **All signatures are required for the award to be processed.** Thus it is highly recommended that the recommending official informally obtain a general agreement between organizational units about the award before beginning the formal process.

Quality Step Increases (QSI's): A QSI is given in conjunction with the annual performance rating. These awards are similar to Within Grade Increases (WGI's) in the General Schedule (GS) pay system. To be eligible, the employee must receive a "fully successful" performance rating and must demonstrate both exceptional quality and quantity of work which will be expected to continue in the future. The incumbent significantly improves the work processes and products for which he or she is responsible. The overall accuracy and thoroughness of the employee's work are exceptional and the impacts of the employee's contributions are of such significance that organizational objectives were accomplished that otherwise would not have been.

A narrative justification must support and describe "outstanding" performance of duties that is characteristic and is expected to be continued in the future. Approval from both the Division Director (or Deputy Administrator) and Administrator are required. Check "Quality Step Increase" in box 16 on the awards form.

C. Awards for Excellence: These are the highest Agency awards that can be given to an employee or team. They recognize employees whose outstanding achievements had a major impact or significant contribution to the attainment of the agency's established goals, NASS strategic planning efforts, or agency performance measures. These awards are presented in an annual ceremony to honor and celebrate the outstanding efforts and contributions of high performing NASS employees. There are four different types of awards under this category: the Administrator's Award; the Gold Award; the Cooperator of the Year Award; and the Circle Award.

Administrator's Award for Excellence: This is an individual recognition which carries a monetary award of \$5,000. Recipients of this award are selected by the NASS Award Committee from Gold Award winners. The administrator is the approving official, and funds these awards.

Cooperator of the Year Award: This non-monetary award is the highest career award that can be given to a NASS employee with a non-Federal appointment. It is a recognition of individuals who are typically State or university employees co-located in NASS offices

working side-by-side with Federal employees. Recipients of this award are selected by the NASS Awards Committee, from nominations sent forward from the FO and SSO Award Committees. The administrator is the approving official.

Gold Award for Excellence: This is an individual recognition which carries a monetary award of \$2,500. Each Division/DAPP/FO award committee selects recipients of this award from nominations submitted by NASS managers and employees. The Director/Deputy Administrator is the approving official. An employee may receive a Gold Award for work recognized earlier in the year through an Extra Effort, Appreciation, Time-Off or Spot Award.

Circle Award for Excellence: This is the highest and most prestigious award that can be given to recognize “teams” or groups of employees. To be eligible for the award, the group must have received a NASS Extra Effort Group Award during the preceding fiscal year. All groups receiving such an award will be nominated for a Circle Award. The NASS Award Committee reviews the nominations and selects the winning groups. There is no fixed award amount for the Circle Award. Each individual in the group will receive an amount equal to the amount received for their Extra Effort Award. The Administrator is the approving official, and the award is funded by the Office of the Administrator. Individuals may be nominated and receive a Circle Award as part of more than one group. An individual may receive a Circle Award while receiving an individual award for excellence for other work during the same year. In each case, however, the work being rewarded must be different.

Selection Process: Individuals or groups may be nominated for an Award for Excellence for either sustained outstanding performance or for special innovation and initiative. The following criteria will be used in reviewing and rating nominations. (These criteria adhere to the Department’s award criteria as listed in the “*Guide for Employee Recognition*”). These criteria will be used to assess how well an individual performed in the context of his/her individual job. They are not to be used to assess the overall contribution of various jobs or job series to the mission of NASS.

- Improving quality and employing unusual creativity
- Completion of a project(s) under unusually tight or difficult time constraints; saving time, money, or material
- Increased productivity and/or increased program effectiveness
- Overcoming adverse obstacles or working under unusual circumstances

The Awards for Excellence nominations will be submitted each year in October. An A-instruction will provide exact dates. Anyone can nominate an individual for an Gold Award for Excellence by completing a write-up addressing the above criteria, and working with the supervisor to submit the nomination to the appropriate Division/SSO/FO Award Committee. State Statisticians and Branch Chiefs, with input from the Division Directors and Deputy Administrators, are particularly encouraged to submit nominations. It is important to

explicitly consider work performed throughout the award year in the nominations for the Awards for Excellence, rather than allowing better “recall” of more recent events to unduly reward on work performed toward the end of the year.

All Gold Award recipients will be sent forward by their respective Division/FO/DAPP Award Committees as nominations for the Administrator’s Award. Likewise, all group extra effort awards will be sent forward as nominations for the NASS Circle Awards. The award committee chair who signed as reviewing official on a Gold or extra effort group award is responsible for ensuring that the award is sent forward at the appropriate time to the NASS award committee as a nomination for the Administrator’s Award or the Circle Award, respectively.

Nominations for the Cooperator of the Year Award are sent to the NASS Award Committee. These nominations may come from State Statisticians, other NASS managers, SSO or FO Award committees or from any employee in NASS.

Committee chairs will use the “Awards for Excellence Committee Action Form” (see Attachment I) for submitting nominations and write-ups to the NASS Award Committee. Nominations should not exceed one (1) typewritten page. The original justification statements for these awards may be updated and enhanced during this submission process.

Additional supervisory and management comments and recommendations may be added, but these also should be limited to one (1) page. Font size should be no smaller than 10 pitch with one-inch margins.

Senior management will present the awards at the annual Celebration of Excellence ceremony in December of each year.

IV. **AWARD COMMITTEES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS:** There are three different types of award committees within NASS, each with somewhat different functions: A) Division Award Committees, DAPP Staff Award Committee, and the FO Award Committee, B) the individual SSO Award Committees, and C) the NASS Award Committee.

A. Division/FO/DAPP Award Committees: Each Headquarters Division and Field Operations have established peer review committees for awards. An additional committee has been established to serve and represent all staff reporting directly to the Administrator, Associate Administrator, or Deputy Administrator for Program and Products. These committees perform similar functions for their respective organizational units.

- Review all Extra Effort Awards and Suggestion Awards (over \$500) for individuals or groups funded by their organizational unit. Committee actions can take any of the following forms: approve the award as submitted; disapprove the award; modify the award by changing award amounts and/or adding or deleting names to group awards. One important purpose of the committee is to review and assess award amounts to provide consistency in awards across supervisors. The Director/Deputy Administrator, working with the committee, must sign for final approval. The committees are encouraged to work with the “recommending official” to understand each award, communicate concerns with the recommendations, and reach consensus on changes.

- Review all nominations for Gold Awards for Excellence and select recipients of this award. The Director/Deputy Administrator, working with the committee, must sign for final approval. The committee is encouraged to communicate closely with managers to get their input into the selection process.
- Send all Gold Award recipients forward to compete for the Administrator's Award.
- Send all Group Extra Effort Awards forward to compete for the Circle Award for Excellence.
- The FO committee may submit nominations to the NASS Award Committee for Cooperator of the Year.
- The FO committee will relinquish some of its responsibilities to SSO award committees when they exist. (See SSO Award Committees below.)
- Track the number of awards, type of awards, award amounts and prepare a Fiscal Year Awards Activity Report in cooperation with the Administrative Services Office and AFM who process the paperwork and awards. Reports should be prepared on a regular basis with a final fiscal year report prepared by October 31 each year.
- Be sensitive to the goal of recognizing employees equitably and fairly, and alert managers to any issues.

The following general criteria should be used in establishing Division/FO/Staff Award Committees:

- The committee should have at least 5 members, including a committee chair who is elected by the committee. Supervisors may serve on the committee, but may not constitute a majority of the committee members and may not serve as chair. It is recommended that members serve for more than one year, and rotate so that there are both new and returning members each year.
- One or more members must also serve on the NASS Award Committee.
- Each committee must establish committee guidelines for how the committee will operate, how the members are selected, length of membership, and define a process for reviewing and approving awards for their SSO or Division. These guidelines must be written, approved by the Director/Deputy Administrator, and distributed to staff.
- The Committee membership must be representative of their organizational unit, using such criteria as job series, grade, and other diversity factors.

B. SSO Awards Committees: Because of the geographically distributed nature of the State Statistical Offices, SSO's were asked to consider establishing awards committees within their offices. The purpose of this change is to involve more people in the SSO in the awards process and to give more local control over the budget and distribution of awards. SSO's have the option to use the Field Operations (FO) Award Committee in lieu of establishing a local committee.

SSO Awards Committees will have many of the same responsibilities and operate in the same manner as the FO Award Committee.

- Review all Extra Effort Awards and Suggestion Awards (over \$500) for individuals or groups funded by the SSO. Committee actions can take any of the following forms: approve the award as submitted; disapprove the award; modify the award by changing award amounts and/or adding or deleting names to group awards. One important purpose of the committee is to review and assess award amounts to provide consistency in awards throughout the office. The State Statistician, working with the committee, must sign for final approval. The committees are encouraged to work with the “recommending official” to understand each award, communicate concerns with the recommendations and reach consensus on changes.
- Review all nominations for Gold Awards for Excellence and Cooperator of the Year. Decide which should be sent forward to the FO Award Committee for review and action.
- Send all Group Extra Effort Awards forward to the NASS Award Committee as nominations for the Circle Award.
- may submit nominations to the NASS Award Committee for Cooperator of the Year.
- Track the number of awards, type of awards, award amounts and prepare a Fiscal Year Awards Activity Report in cooperation with the Administrative Services Office and AFM who process the paperwork and awards. Reports should be prepared on a regular basis with a final fiscal year report prepared by October 31 each year.
- Be sensitive to the goal of recognizing employees equitably and fairly, and alert managers to any issues.

The following general criteria should be used in establishing SSO Award Committees:

- The committee should have at least 3 members, including a committee chair who is elected by the committee. State Statisticians and Deputy State Statisticians may not serve on the committee. It is recommended that members serve for more than one year, and rotate so that there are both new and returning members each year.
- Each committee must establish committee guidelines for how the committee will operate, how the members are selected, length of membership, and define a process for reviewing and approving awards for their SSO. These guidelines must be written, approved by the State Statistician and distributed annually to staff.
- The Committee membership must be representative of their SSO, using such criteria as job series, grade, and other diversity factors.

NASS Award Committee: This committee is established by the Administrator to provide an employee and peer review of agency awards and policies. Members are selected by the Administrator, with recommendations from their Division Director or Deputy Administrator. Members must concurrently serve as a member of a Division/FO/DAPP awards committee. One member is selected from each of the five HQ award committees and two from the FO award committee. Each member serves a 3-year term with two members being rotated onto and off the committee each January. A representative from the Administrative and Financial Management (AFM) should attend committee meetings, as needed, to advise the committee on Departmental, mission area, and agency-level policies and issues. However, this person is not a voting member of the committee. The committee will elect a chair. Supervisors may serve on the committee, but may not constitute a majority of the committee members and may not serve as chair.

The functions of the committee include:

- Review all cross-organizational Extra Effort Group Awards. Committee actions can take any of the following forms: approve the award as submitted; disapprove the award; modify the award by changing award amounts and/or adding or deleting names to group awards. One important purpose of the committee is to review and assess award amounts to provide consistency in awards across Divisions and SSOs. The chairs of affected Division/FO/SSO/DAPP award committees must sign for concurrence. The committee is encouraged to work with the “recommending official” to understand each award, communicate concerns with the recommendations, and reach consensus on changes.
- Review all nominations for the Administrator’s Award for Excellence, Circle Award for Excellence and the Cooperator of the Year Award. Select recipients of these awards. The Administrator, working with the committee, must sign for final approval. The committee is encouraged to communicate closely with managers and their respective award committees to get their input into the selection process.
- Track the number of awards, type of awards, award amounts and prepare a Fiscal Year Awards Activity Report in cooperation with the BASO and AFM who process the paperwork and awards. Reports should be prepared on a regular basis with a final fiscal year report prepared by October 31 each year.
- Be sensitive to the goal of recognizing employees equitably and fairly, and alert managers to any issues.

- V. **REVIEW PROCESS FOR ALL COMMITTEES:** The Committee Chair receives and distributes copies of the award recommendations and supporting documentation to committee members for review. Committee members may contact the author and/or others for information that may assist in the review process. The committee will meet to discuss the award justification and criteria used, with the field representative submitting comments via cc:Mail or through teleconference, if necessary. A consensus (reached by following the operating guidelines of the committee) is needed by the committee to approve or disapprove the award. In some cases, the written justification is returned to the recommending official for additional information before it will be approved by the committee. However, if an award is not approved or the recommended amount of the award is significantly

reduced, the committee will prepare a written justification of its action to the sponsor of the award. The entire process will take no longer than 10 business days to complete after initially receiving the paperwork in Headquarters. The Committee Chair will be responsible for preparing and distributing minutes of each meeting to the committee and the management. If a committee member is recommended for an award, the review process would be the same but would proceed without participation by the potential award recipient.

- VI. **PUBLICITY:** BASO is responsible for publicizing awards on the NASSNet on a monthly basis. The Awards for Excellence will also be publicized and celebrated. The NASS Awards Catalog is available on the NASSNet for ordering non-monetary mementoes.
- VII. **POLICY REVIEW:** This awards policy will be reviewed each year in an effort to find the best ways to recognize employees for their outstanding performance, teamwork, cost-efficiency, and customer service in NASS and conform to Departmental policy changes.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment I -- Completing the Paperwork.

Attachment II – Frequently Asked Questions.

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COMPLETING THE PAPERWORK

When completed, all paperwork should be submitted to the Field Operations Budget and Administrative Service Office (BASO) in Washington, D.C. for processing.

Form AD-287-2: All awards, both monetary and non-monetary require a Form AD-287-2. Most boxes on the form are self-explanatory. The following are helpful suggestions:

- Boxes 2-6: Name of Employee, etc.
For Group Awards, type "See Attached List". Attach a list of individuals names, social security numbers, positions, series/grade, organization/location. Include a brief description of how each individual contributed to the group effort, and the amount of the award for each individual.
- Box 11: Citation.
This should be short (25 words or less). It will be published on the NASSNet.
- Box 12: Type of Recognition.
Generally self explanatory.
Awards for Excellence:
Administrator's, Gold and Circle Awards are recorded as Extra Effort awards. The Cooperator of the Year Award is recorded as a Keepsake award.
- Box 14: Total Award.
For Group Awards, record the award value for the entire group.
- Box 15: Dollar Amount Basis:
See Attachment III for ideas on calculating award amounts based on value of contribution.
- Boxes 20-22: Signatures
The general rule for most awards is first-line supervisors will sign the form as the *Recommending Individual*. Committee chairpersons will sign as the *Reviewing Officials*. Division Directors, Deputy Administrator, Associate Administrator, or Administrator will serve as the *Approving Officials*. For awards not needing committee review, only two signatures are required, one for the *Recommending Individual* and one for *Approving Official* and these are generally the first-line and second-line supervisors of the employee. Any employee may recommend another employee or group for an award, but the supervisor of the recommended employee or group must be the recommending official who officially signs the award. The Division Director should also have an opportunity to provide input and support for the recommended award.

Justification Statement: *Awards over \$500 or any time-off award exceeding 10 hours require a written justification attached to Form 287-2. Group awards in which the total award is over \$500 must have a justification statement even if each individual is to receive less than \$500. The justification statement for awards should range from ½ page to one page, with higher award amounts requiring greater justification. The statement must include the following: (1) time period covered, who was involved, and what was accomplished, (2) how performance exceeded expectations, (3) results achieved, and (4) proposed award amount calculated using measurable and non-measurable-scales as documented in the USDA Guide for Employee Recognition. Awards for Excellence justifications should address the criteria outlined in Section III C in this PSM.*

Special Processing Instructions for Time Off Awards: Apart from the award form, the timekeeper should record total number of hours awarded in the REMARKS box in the Enter/Modify Supplemental Information section of the employee's Time and Attendance record. As time-off hours are used, they should be recorded as administrative leave, project code 399. During subsequent pay periods, the timekeeper should update the REMARKS box to keep track of the amount of time-off still available to the employee.

Special Processing Instructions for Spot Awards: All supervisors must use PCMS checks for all Spot Awards, and an AD-287-2 form must be completed. NFC does not allow Spot Awards to be paid by direct deposit or by an NFC check. Therefore, please use the following administrative procedures for processing all NASS Spot Awards.

Step 1: Complete all appropriate boxes on the AD-287-2; i.e., the citation, check "Spot Award," and enter the award amount. Spot Awards do not require a written justification. However, they are limited to a maximum of \$500 per award. (There is no longer any limit to the number of spot awards that can be given to an employee in a year.) Call BASO, to get a Case Number. Enter the Awards Case Number on the upper right-hand corner of the AD-287-2 in the space provided. Enter the PCMS check number, the date of the check, and the name of the person holding the checking account on which payment was made in box 9 (address area). All information on the form is used to update the awards database by AFM and balance financial and administrative documents. All Spot Awards must have two signatures for approval. The immediate supervisor should sign as the recommending official and the second level supervisor should sign as the approving official.

Step 2: Prepare and sign the PCMS check. Be sure that the PCMS check amount and the amount on the award form are the same. The check writer should keep a copy of the AD-287-2 for their financial records. PCMS checks for Spot Awards cannot be written without case numbers and the case number should be written on the check.

Step 3: Inform the employee that the amount will be grossed up when the action is processed by NFC. Therefore, the employee's earning statement (as well as the Notification of Personnel Action, SF-50) will show a higher amount (to cover the tax) than the amount of the PCMS check. The amount of the employee's paycheck should not change. If this should happen, please let BASO staff know. Please note the \$500 maximum is based on the amount received and not the grossed up amount. The grossed up amount of taxes will appear in your accounts at NFC.

Step 4: Send the AD-287-2 form to designated BASO staff who will verify the information and forward the form to AFM for NFC processing.

Special Processing Instructions for Awards for Excellence:

The “Awards for Excellence Committee Action Form” must be attached to the AD-287-2 for processing of nominations for awards for excellence.

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE ACTION FORM

Name: _____

Committee: _____

Recommending Official's Recommendation:

- ☐ Recommended for Gold Award
- ☐ Recommended for Cooperator of the Year Award
- ☐ Recommended for Circle Award

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Division/FO Award Committee Action:

- ☐ Selected ☐ Not Selected for Gold Award
- ☐ Nominated for Administrator's Award
- ☐ Nominated for Cooperator of the Year Award
- ☐ Nominated for Circle Award

Signature of Award Committee Chair

Date

NASS Award Committee Action:

- ☐ Selected ☐ Not Selected for Administrator's Award
- ☐ Selected ☐ Not Selected for Cooperator of the Year Award
- ☐ Selected ☐ Not Selected for Circle Award

Signature of NASS Award Committee Chair

Date

Administrator's Approval:

- ☐ Approved
- ☐ Not Approved

Signature of Administrator

Date

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is due when?

A new A-Instruction for the Awards for Excellence will be issued each year to provide updated administrative details on the due dates, etc.

Who is the “recommending official” for an award?

Typically, the “recommending official” is the employee’s immediate or second level supervisor. State Statisticians, Deputy State Statisticians, Section Heads, and Branch Chiefs are normally the “recommending official”. Executive sponsors for teams may serve as the “recommending official” for team award nominations.

Who else can recommend an employee for an award?

Any NASS employee may serve as recommending official and recommend an individual or group for an appropriate award. All review and approval processes would then be followed. Nominations to the NASS Award Committee for the Administrator’s Award, Circle Award, and Cooperator of the Year Award may only come from other award committees as outlined in this document.

Can an employee send an award nomination directly to an Awards Committee for approval?

Yes. However, an employee is encouraged to work with the immediate supervisor of the colleague being nominated to simplify and expedite the nomination and review process. Nominations to the NASS Award Committee for the Administrator’s Award, Circle Award, and Cooperator of the Year Award may only come from other award committees as outlined in this document.

Who serves as the “reviewing official” for an award?

The Chairperson serving on the appropriate awards committee signs as the “reviewing official” upon approval of the award by that committee. For awards that do not require committee approval, a second level supervisor may sign as the reviewer. Spot Awards and Time-off Awards (of less than 10 hours) do not require the signature of a reviewing official.

Who serves as the “approving official” for an award?

Division Directors, Deputy Administrators, Associate Administrator, or Administrator approve all Extra Effort Awards and Awards for Excellence which obligate their respective budgets. Appreciation Awards, Time-off (less than 10 hours) Awards and Spot Awards are approved at lower management levels.

When does a separate awards justification need to be written?

It is required for awards in amount greater than \$500 and when a “time off” award exceeds 10 hours. However, since all extra effort awards are reviewed by a committee, the committee normally would need some narrative justification to describe the award recommendation.

How long must an awards justification be?

There is no standard or established narrative length for an award justification. Content is more important than length. However, the greater the accomplishment or achievement and the higher the level of recognition, the greater the documentation needed to fully describe the employee’s achievements, etc. Typically, no more than one page of documentation is needed by the committee to evaluate the recommendation.

What happens if the Award Committee questions the award justification or believes the recommended award amount should be higher or lower?

When questions arise, the committee generally goes back to the recommending official and asks for clarification or additional justification for the award. Generally, the recommending official and the committee will arrive at a consensus regarding the action to take. However, the committee has the authority to disapprove an award, modify the award amount or allocate the amount differently between group members, and/or delete or add names to a group award. The committee is also obligated to work with managers to stay within budget allocations for awards, and for this reason the Director/State Statistician/Deputy Administrator has the final approval of an award.

Can a supervisor recommend an award for an employee in another SSO or Division?

Yes. The award amount will be obligated to the SSO or Division who initiates the award. The recommending official is responsible for contacting the employee’s immediate supervisor to alert him or her, to get additional input, and reach agreement that the award is appropriate. The committee should assume that the recommending official has done this when they receive the award recommendation and paperwork.

Alternatively, anyone in NASS may contact an employee’s supervisor and suggest that the individual be considered for an award.

Can a Circle Award be given to a group who has not received an Extra Effort Group Award during the preceding fiscal year?

No. Circle Awards are chosen based on nominations by Division/FO/DAPP Award Committees from those groups that have received an Extra Effort Group Award sometime during the year. Similarly, the Administrator’s Award is chosen from among those individuals who have received a Gold Award.

Do all awards need SSO or Division Award Committee review and approval?

Appreciation, Time-off, Suggestion (\$500 or less) and Spot Awards do not need committee review and approval. QSI performance awards also do not go through the award committees, but they require approval by the Administrator.

If an SSO Awards Committee is formed what is the role of the State Statistician and Deputy in the awards process?

Either the State Statistician and Deputy may serve as the recommending officials for award nominations. The State Statistician will be the approving official for awards within his/her budgetary authority. The State Statistician also makes the final decision regarding the formation (or the dissolution) of an SSO Awards Committee and establishes the budgetary guidelines for the committee. Depending on the guidelines set up for the SSO committee, the State Statistician and/or Deputy may select the members of the SSO award committee. The State Statistician is the responsible for the overall success of the SSO's awards process.

How will the awards budget be administered in SSO's which form awards committees?

Each State will be allocated an awards budget by Field Operations. The State Statistician is responsible for identifying a budget for spot awards, extra effort awards, and any other awards criteria. The SSO Awards Committee will be responsible to the State Statistician for keeping award obligations within the established SSO budget allocation.

How will the awards budget be administered in the SSO's which continue to use the FO Awards Committee?

HQ-FO will continue to send States their Spot Award budget allocation for administration by the State Statistician. The FO Awards committee will be responsible to the Deputy Administrator for FO for keeping higher award obligations within a combined SSO allocation for these SSOs.

Can a State delay the decision and create an SSO Awards Committee at a later date?

Yes. An SSO Awards Committee can be formed anytime. When an SSO Awards Committee is created, an awards budget is allocated to the State.

Can a State disband their SSO Awards Committee?

Yes, the State can disband their committee at anytime. The final decision to disband or establish a SSO Awards Committee rests with the State Statistician. The State Statistician would also notify Field Operations about the change. The State's entire awards budget would be reviewed and reallocated allowing the FO Awards Committee to administer the remaining portion of the State's Extra Effort Awards budget.

How will changes to awards be communicated from the FO Awards Committee back to the States?

The FO Awards Committee will notify the State Statistician of changes to an award nomination submitted to the committee for review. If a State has established an SSO Awards Committee, the State Statistician will work with the SSO Awards Committee at the local level and provide feedback to the FO Awards Committee for a final concurrence on determining the final awards action. The FO Awards Committee will give the strongest possible consideration to recommendations endorsed by the SSO managers plus an SSO Awards Committee.

How are awards for State Stats and Deputy State Stats handled?

State Statisticians will be in a separate budget pool administered by the FO Awards Committee. Award recommendations will be made by the FO Headquarters managers. Awards for Deputy State Statisticians will be included in the SSO budget with the award determined by the State Statistician working with the SSO Awards Committee.

Who determines the awards budget and allocation each year?

The Administrator. Generally, the awards budget allocation ranges from 1.0 to 1.5 percent of the agency salaries. The Division Directors, Deputy Administrators, and Associate Administrator administer awards allocations within their Division, SSO's or other units.

When are award budget allocations made?

In October each year.

When do awards budgets need to be spent (or obligated)? (See effective date question below)

The fiscal year ends on September 30 each year. However, paperwork should be provided to the Budget and Administrative Service Office (BASO) by September 1 in order to expedite the paperwork through the end-of-year budget processing. However, the "effective date" for the disbursement of awards processed in September can be in the next fiscal year, if a designated "effective date" is requested. All award forms obligating current fiscal year funds need to be approved with official signatures on or before September 30.

Is there a way to handle a special situation if we exceed our budget?

Possibly, but don't count on it! Budget questions should be addressed directly with the appropriate Director or Deputy Administrator.

Does the entire awards budget for an SSO or Division need to be spent each year?

No. However, the excess can not be carried over to fund awards for the next year.

Regarding awards luncheon expenditures, what is allowed and what is not?

The Government Employees Incentive Awards Act permits agencies to use operating appropriations to pay for food and refreshments (non-alcoholic) in connection with agency employee award ceremonies for federal and non-federal employees. The key is that food and refreshments should be served that are appropriate for the occasion. Ideally, this is finger food items and light refreshments but could include light luncheons, etc. The award ceremony should not be combined with other types of celebrations.

What happens if a committee member is nominated for an award?

Nominated committee members should not be involved in the evaluation of their own award nominations, and must excuse themselves from the meeting and deliberations.

How does an committees handle the issue of confidentiality?

Maintaining the confidentiality of committee discussions and decisions is critically important. Procedures for maintaining that confidentiality should be explicitly outlined in committee operating guidelines and strictly enforced.

For employees who transfer to another Division during the year, who pays for the awards given at the end-of -the-year?

Award budget allocations for each Division are made at the beginning of the new fiscal year based on the Division's staffing at that time. The awards payment for an employee is from the Division where the employee was counted at the time of the allocation. Supervisors in the receiving Division should work out the administrative details with the employees' previous supervisors when recommending and completing the awards form.

Can an award be specified to be effective on an "effective date"?

Yes, an award may be written to be effective on a specified date in the future. However, the BASO staff will need to be notified that you are requesting that the award be effective on a specific future date.

DEPARTMENT'S GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

May be found on <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/recog.htm>